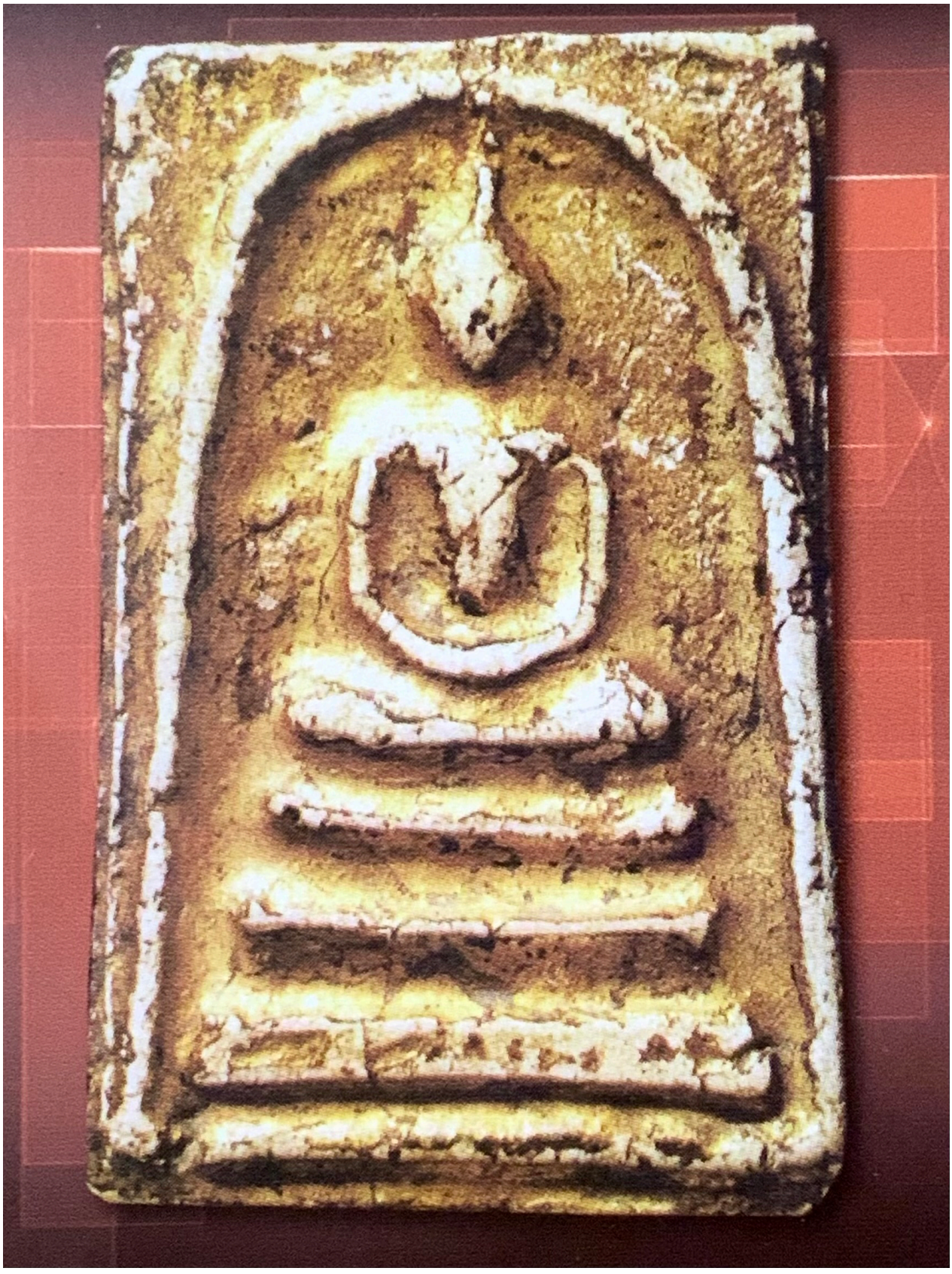
The Mysteries of Pra Somdej Unveiled



This book is an in-depth exploration of the artistry, symbolism, and spiritual significance of the Pra Somdej Wat Rakang amulet, with a focus on the revered Kesa Thalu Sum (“Crest Piercing the Arch”) design. More than just an antique Buddhist artifact, the Pra Somdej is a sacred object imbued with deep philosophical meaning, reflecting both the principles of Buddhist cosmology and the craftsmanship of Thailand’s greatest spiritual artisans.

The book diligently analyzes the proportions, structural elements, and esoteric symbolism within the amulet's design. Key aspects explored include the relationship between the arched frame and the radiant Plew Lokuttara ("Transcendent Flame"), a representation of the Buddha's boundless wisdom extending beyond worldly confines.

The book also examines the role of Luang Wichan Jiranai, the royal goldsmith, who is believed to have carved the original master mold of the Somdej amulet, and the aesthetic principles behind the Krop Krajok (sacred glass frame) with its precise 2:3 ratio, a proportion that enhances the amulet's visual harmony.

This volume is both a historical and artistic deep dive into one of the most iconic and mysterious Buddhist amulets ever created. Essential reading for collectors, scholars, and those with a deep faith in Buddhism and sacred art, it preserves knowledge that is at risk of being lost to time, ensuring that future generations may continue to understand, appreciate, and benefit from the wisdom embedded within these sacred relics.

Author's Preface;

The study of Pra Somdej amulets is an ocean of knowledge. It is so vast, profound, and intricate, that even a lifetime of research would not suffice to fully document its depths. As one of the most revered and enigmatic categories of Thai Buddhist amulets, Pra Somdej has captured the hearts and minds of devotees, collectors, and scholars for generations.

Yet, much of the vast body of wisdom surrounding these sacred artifacts remains inaccessible to most, even within Thailand itself. In the modern age, where the younger generations show diminishing interest in preserving this precious heritage, the risk of losing an invaluable part of Buddhist and Thai spiritual history grows ever more imminent.

This book is part of an ongoing series dedicated to unveiling the hidden knowledge of Pra Somdej, a mission born out of my lifelong passion for Buddhist amulets, sacred arts, and the esoteric sciences of Siam.

As the author of Buddha Magic, Sak Yant Buddhist Tattoos, and The Book of Thai Lanna Sorcery, and as an ex Buddhist Monk and Thai lersi Hermit, I have spent decades immersed in the study and practice of these sacred traditions, working to preserve and make accessible the wisdom that has long been held by only a few.

Through this series of specialized e-books, I aim to compile, document, and share the intricate details of Pra Somdej amulets, examining their historical origins, artistic nuances, sacred inscriptions, and the philosophies embedded within their forms.

This is not merely a study of antique Buddhist art but an endeavor to preserve the spiritual and cultural significance of these sacred objects for future generations.

Whether you are a practitioner of Buddhism, a believer in the mystical properties of sacred amulets, or an antique collector drawn to the exquisite craftsmanship of Thailand’s master monks, this work is dedicated to you. May it serve as both a bridge to lost knowledge and an act of merit in conserving this sacred tradition.

Greetings, dear readers and enthusiasts in the field of sacred amulets. From this issue onward, I have assigned myself the task of presenting in-depth knowledge about Pra Somdej amulets, particularly from new perspectives that have never been revealed before. Ajarn Spencer Littlewood .

HOW CAN ONE DISTINGUISH THE CORRECT MOLD WITH PRECISION? - WAYS TO AUTHENTICATE GENUINE SOMDEJ AMULETS?

Based on my extensive study of Thai amulets, especially the fundamental examination of Somdej Wat Rakang, experienced experts, from revered masters to knowledgeable traders at amulet markets, generally summarize the key principles as follows:

• Memorize the mold patterns accurately to know which tell-tale signs to look for according to each mold.

• Analyze the composition and texture of the material.

• Observe the natural aging process.

• Then confirm if it is a preferred design model or lesser accepted mold.

Through my dedicated study of Somdej Wat Rakang amulets, I have found these principles to be fundamentally correct. A simple glance through a magnifying glass can already determine whether the mold is correct or not, but this is a complex topic that requires in-depth discussion.

My research into Buddhist art and the craftsmanship of amulet mold designs has provided me with clarity and a deeper understanding of Somdej amulet molds. I can confidently conclude that the creative concept and artistic design of these amulets play a crucial role

in their evaluation.

Some may wonder whether the mold of a Somdej amulet holds significant importance. In reality, understanding the molds of Wat Rakang Somdej amulets is a specialized field that only experienced collectors and experts can truly master. Skilled individuals in this field develop a keen ability to recognize and analyze Buddhist art, which allows them to memorize and accurately identify authentic molds.

SO, HOW SHOULD ONE PROPERLY EXAMINE THE MOLD OF A SOMDEJ AMULET IN TRUE DETAIL?

To verify the authenticity of a Somdej Wat Rakang amulet by Somdej Phra Phutthajarn Toh (Somdej Toh), collectors use several techniques and guidelines based on the unique characteristics of the amulet. Here are the key policies and methods used for inspection:

1. Examine the Material and Aging:

Somdej Wat Rakang amulets are made from a mixture of sacred ingredients, including clay and various powders. The material should show signs of aging, with a slightly worn appearance and patina over time. Authentic pieces often have a distinctive texture and weight that cannot be easily replicated.

2. Check the "Glass Frame" (กรอบกระจก):

As mentioned earlier, the "glass frame" refers to the design of the edges that are slightly raised and often have a square shape. Inspecting the frame's proportions, the line work, and how well it complements the rest of the design is essential. The proportion of the "glass frame" should align closely with a 2:3 ratio, reflecting balance and symmetry, and the frame should be delicately raised, especially on the upper edges. Counterfeit pieces may lack this precise craftsmanship. also with aging there will be contractions and cracks that are uneven which is very difficult to replicate in fakes. The surface of the clay will also have a very fossilized effect which is also difficult to replicate.

3. Look for the Sacred Markings or Inscriptions:

Somdej Toh's amulets often bear sacred inscriptions or symbols that may include his name or mystical symbols etched in the mold. These symbols are usually finely detailed and can be difficult to replicate exactly. The inscriptions should be clear, consistent, and accurate to known examples of Somdej Toh's amulets. Some forgeries may lack this level of detail or may have rough, inconsistent engraving.

4. Use a Magnifying Glass to Inspect Fine Details:

A magnifying glass or loupe is helpful for inspecting the fine lines and details of the design. Authentic Somdej Wat Rakang amulets exhibit exquisite craftsmanship, with subtle nuances that are not easy to copy, especially in the fine line work, curves, and the depth of the mold. Any inconsistencies or rough spots could suggest a forgery.

5. Check the "Transcendental Flame" or "Flame of Wisdom" (เปลวโลกุตระ):

The flame or halo around the Buddha's head in authentic pieces often extends far beyond the traditional circle, symbolizing transcendent wisdom. This flame is an important symbol, and its form is critical in determining authenticity. Fake pieces may have poorly rendered or irregular flames that don't maintain the exact proportions and elegance of the original.

6. Weight and Feel:

Authentic Somdej Wat Rakang amulets typically have a specific weight that feels right for the material. Counterfeit amulets may feel lighter or heavier, as they are often made from cheaper materials. Holding the amulet and carefully assessing its weight and balance can be a useful method to determine authenticity.

7. Use of UV Light:

In some cases, UV light is used to check the authenticity of the amulet, especially to look for hidden markings or to confirm the age of the material. Authentic amulets from Somdej Toh tend to have a consistent patina under UV light, while forgeries may show irregularities. however this is not considered by all experts to be a trustworthy method of authentication.

Much like in the case of the so-called "atomic testing" which cannot really be performed on things less than 200 years old which makes the method invalid for this amulet until a few more decades have passed. after which perhaps that method of testing might become a valid method but only the insights and the expert of the true student with experience and ownership of authentic Pra Somdej can really decide.

8. Consulting Experts and Trusted Sources:

The best way to confirm an amulet's authenticity is by consulting with an experienced amulet expert or a trusted seller with a good reputation. Many serious collectors and dealers in Thailand specialize in authenticating amulets and can provide expert advice. Established collectors often have access to databases or records of known authentic Somdej Wat Rakang amulets for comparison.

In summary, verifying the authenticity of a Somdej Wat Rakang amulet involves a combination of visual inspection, tactile evaluation, and expert consultation. The most important factors include the craftsmanship of the design, the material, the proportions, the inscriptions, and the use of symbols such as the transcendental flame.

If the amulet doesn't align with the known characteristics of genuine Somdej Wat Rakang pieces, it's likely a forgery, or if the ingredients of the sacred clay present themselves as authentic, then it would mean that it is a letter known mold, probably made by locals and not very beautifully carved or, not very many models were pressed so the societies do not wish to included in the pantheon.

This is due to the fact, that to add every single strange model that were made from the simpler block presses, made by the local folk around the temple, to help press all of the Amulets in time (which have to be 84,000, according to the 84,000 teachings within the Buddhist canon), would be a monumental task to categorize every single slightly different model.

For this reason, not every single model is accepted by the major societies. However, this does not mean they are not authentic. There are many authentic models which are less seen and less known and less in numbers, and these kind of models are known as 'Pim Plaek' (strange models).

They are usually available at much lower prices, and for those in the know who are true devoted followers of Somdej Pra Puttajarn (Dto) Prohmrangsri, love to collect these Amulets, in the belief that the power is the same and the only difference being the price.

DHAMMA MYSTERY: THE THREE-TIERED BASE OF SOMDEJ WAT RAKANG

One of the most distinctive structural features of Somdej Wat Rakang amulets is the image of the Buddha seated in meditation on a three-tiered throne, enclosed within a finely proportioned haloed frame.

This unique design was discussed by Triyampawai in one of his treatises, where he speculated that Somdej Phra Buddhacharn (To) may have derived its blueprint from the Somdej Arahant amulet of Somdej Sangharaja Suk (Kai Thuean) during the early Rattanakosin period.

The lion-legged base of the throne symbolizes the Sammuti Sangha (conventional clergy) or spiritually resolute individuals—those with unwavering determination, like lions, who seek enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of existence.

The lowest tier of the base has a trapezoidal shape, wider at the bottom and tapering towards the top, with a length greater than the other two tiers. This formation resembles Mount Sumeru, the cosmic axis in Buddhist cosmology. Symbolically, it represents the vast assembly of lay followers —upasakas and upasikas—who uphold and support the Buddhist faith, ensuring its unwavering continuity.

Although the three tiers of the base vary in length, they share the same width. This subtle design, possibly an artistic or philosophical choice, creates an optical illusion where the tiers appear to recede in a natural sequence.

Similar to mural paintings that depict the Buddha with an illusion of depth, this careful craftsmanship enhances the amulet's aesthetic and symbolic depth.

In Figure 1, two variations of the Somdej Wat Rakang amulet are displayed: the "Khet Thalu Sum" (halo-piercing head) and the "Khet Bua Tum" (closed-lotus head) models.

Understanding the Three-Tiered Base

The three-tiered base comprises:

• The Upper Tier: The shortest in length, with both ends smoothly curved, almost forming a semicircle. This tier represents the lotus throne, signifying the enlightened state of the Buddha. It symbolizes the ariyas—those who have attained wisdom through the teachings of the Supreme Buddha.

• The Middle Tier: Slightly longer than the upper tier but shorter than the lowest one. It features raised corners, earning it the name “Singh Base” (Lion Base or 'Thaan Singh') among amulet experts. This name originates from Figure 2, which illustrates the consistent width of all three tiers in Somdej Wat Rakang amulets.

For devotees who revere Somdej Phra Buddhacharn (To) or believe in the sacred power of the Somdej Wat Rakang, observing its three-tiered base serves as a reminder of its profound spiritual significance. Each tier embodies layers of Buddhist philosophy, reinforcing the amulet’s role as

both an artistic and devotional masterpiece, and the foundational symbolism that represents different stages of spiritual progression.

The uppermost tier serves as the immediate pedestal for the Buddha image, embodying the state of supreme enlightenment. This layer is associated with the Arahants—those who have fully realized the Dhamma and attained liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

The middle tier, often referred to as the "Singha base" due to its raised edges, represents the Sangha—the monastic community of monks and nuns. It symbolizes the guardians of the Buddha's teachings, steadfast and resolute like lions, upholding and propagating the Dhamma across generations.

The lowermost tier, broader than the rest, signifies the lay community—the countless householders who support and uphold the faith. Just as a mighty mountain provides a stable foundation, this tier reflects the role of devoted lay followers who ensure the endurance of Buddhism through their unwavering faith and practice.

Although the three tiers are visually distinct, their widths remain consistent, creating an optical illusion of layered depth, much like ancient mural paintings where perspective is subtly manipulated. This design is not merely an artistic choice but a deliberate representation of the interconnected roles within the Buddhist tradition—laypeople, monks, and enlightened beings—working together to sustain the path to Nirvana.

This large arc overlaps the halo's curve by about half of a circle's circumference. It is an incredible coincidence—or perhaps the height of artistic brilliance—that the arch's curve is precisely twice the circumference of the Buddha's arm. This creates an aesthetic harmony, where each line is intricately related to the next in perfect proportion.

THE "KES THALU SUM" (PIERCING THE ARCH) STYLE: THE INFINITE WISDOM OF BUDDHA

At this point, have you realized who carved the mold for the Somdej Wat Rakang amulets for Somdej Toh? Even Tri Yampawai, a grandmaster in the field of Thai amulets, once attributed the design of the Somdej Wat

Rakang amulets to Luang Wicharn Jirayanai, borrowing from the name of the chief royal goldsmith during the reign of King Rama IV. However, history has recorded very little about him with no documented lineage, surname, or any traceable records. What remains are only his masterpieces, works of immeasurable value that continue to captivate minds to this day.

Unquestionably, many mysteries still surround the design of the Somdej amulet, which, despite being composed of only a few delicate lines and contours, embodies profound beauty and artistry that transcends its era by over a century. A prime example of this enigma can be seen in the Somdej Wat Rakang Pim Yai (Large Mold) with “Kes Thalu Sum”, where the top of the Buddha’s ushnisha extends beyond the arch.

This arch, commonly referred to by amulet enthusiasts as “Suam Wai Pha Seek” (Split Rattan Arch) or simply a curved arch, is, in reality, the Prabhamandala, the radiant halo of the Buddha. In Buddhist art, the Kes (ushnisha) is formally known as the “Plew Lokutara”, a flame-like emanation symbolizing transcendental wisdom, representing Lokuttara Dhamma (the supramundane truth). This signifies that the Buddha’s wisdom, which leads to ultimate liberation, is beyond and above the world. It is the highest truth, surpassing the three realms of existence.

Furthermore, to visually distinguish the Buddha from his disciples, sculptors intentionally emphasized this flaming radiance above the head. This distinctive feature allows even the common observer to instantly recognize the Buddha upon first glance. The elongated Plew Lokutara resembles the Mahaparinirvana Flame, an artistic element with deep symbolic meaning.

But why did the artisan of the Somdej mold deliberately extend this Lokutara Flame beyond the Prabhamandala? This might be connected to the concept of a Paññadhika Bodhisattva—one who, in past lives, primarily cultivated wisdom parami (Paññā-bāramī) in their pursuit of enlightenment before descending to guide sentient beings.

This hidden symbolism suggests that the Buddha’s supreme wisdom outshines even the radiant halo, reminding us that the true path to enlightenment lies in wisdom and insight rather than supernatural miracles. The luminous Prabhamandala is a reminder of the Buddha’s miraculous nature, but the flame that extends beyond it urges us to focus on wisdom as the means to transcend suffering.

THE ARCH AND THE FRAME: A SIGNATURE OF ARTISTIC PRECISION

The artistic brilliance of Buddhist sculpture does not end here. Tri Yampawai once observed in his writings on the “Mulasutra Proportions of the Frame” that the ratio between the width (base) and height (vertical length) of these amulets is almost always 2:3. When measured carefully, this proportion is indeed present in the Somdej Wat Rakang Pim Yai (Large Mold) with Kes Thalu Chum. The height of the Plew Lokutara (Transcendental Flame) aligns perfectly with the outer rectangular frame, known in the amulet world as the “Krob Kra Jok” (Glass Frame).

This frame is subtly outlined by a raised border on the top, left, and right sides, while the bottom edge is thicker. Some theorists suggest that this glass frame was intentionally designed to serve as a cutting guide, ensuring that the Somdej amulet maintains its perfectly balanced proportions. However, in some amulets where the frame was cut beyond its intended lines, a different yet equally beautiful form emerged. Tri Yampawai regarded this alternative framing as one of the most elegant styles ever seen.

Upon measuring the glass frame from its base to the tip of the Plew Lokutara, we find the same 2:3 ratio present, reinforcing the idea that this was not a random design but a carefully calculated artistic vision. This frame, meticulously crafted by the sculptor, can be interpreted as the boundary of the Buddha's infinite wisdom, encompassing the Prabhamandala on all sides.

If Somdej Toh's Chinabanchorn Katha is a condensed recitation of the Buddha's sacred attributes, then the Somdej Wat Rakang amulet itself is a condensed representation of Buddhist wisdom. Every time one sees or touches this sacred object, it should serve as a reminder of the Triple Gem; the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, symbolically layered upon one another within the amulet's form. This represents a spiritual anchor, helping beings and devotees stay firm in their faith, avoiding defilements and the downward pull of 'unwholes'.

To explain further, consider this remarkable example: some versions of the Somdej amulet feature a circular imprint at the center, an artistic element that appears to be centuries ahead of its time. The ability to craft such exquisite and profound designs, particularly in the various forms of Wat Rakang Somdej, demonstrates an exceptional mastery of craftsmanship.

This large circular line overlays the radiant halo (prabhamandala) of the Buddha, intersecting it at a segment equal to one-sixth of its circumference.

Whether this is a mere coincidence or a deliberate act of genius remains a mystery. However, what is clear is the incredible symmetry of the design, where the curved arch of the surrounding frame (called the 'sum' by amulet collectors) is exactly twice the circumference of the Buddha's halo. This calculated precision enhances the amulet's aesthetic appeal, showcasing the engraver's sophisticated understanding of design balance.

In some amulets, the complete circular imprint appears even larger, with its radius precisely twice that of a smaller, secondary circle within the arch

Hence, one may ask who was responsible for carving the master mold for the revered Somdej Wat Rakang amulets? Even the legendary amulet scholar Triyampawai identified the mold as being the work of Luang Wijarn Chiranai, a title associated with the chief royal goldsmith during the reign of King Rama IV.

Yet, very little historical documentation exists about Luang Wijarn Chiranai. His lineage, surname, and other personal details remain obscure, leaving only his exceptional craftsmanship as evidence of his existence. Despite this, the lasting impact of his work is undeniable, as the Somdej Wat Rakang amulet continues to captivate and mystify collectors to this day.

One of the greatest mysteries surrounding these amulets lies in their minimalist yet transcendent use of simple carved lines, arranged in such a way that they reflect an artistic and spiritual sensibility far ahead of their era. The Somdej Wat Rakang, Pim Yai (Large Mold) Kesa Thalu Sump is a striking example of this profound artistic and symbolic depth.

The most notable feature of this design is the elongated tip of the Buddha's flame-like ushnisha (cranial protuberance), which extends beyond the surrounding arch. Amulet collectors often refer to this arch as the "split rattan arch" or "curved arch".

But in reality, it represents the prabhamandala, the radiant halo of the Buddha. The ushnisha itself, in Buddhist art, is known as the Pluea Lokuttara, a flame symbolizing transcendental wisdom.

This element signifies Lokuttara Dhamma, or supramundane wisdom, which exists beyond the three realms of existence. It serves as a visual cue for distinguishing the Buddha from his disciples at first glance, emphasizing his enlightened state.

The flame-like ushnisha bears a striking resemblance to the Mokha Phee flame, a reference to the supreme wisdom that surpasses even supernatural miracles

But why did the master engraver of the Somdej Wat Rakang mold deliberately extend this radiant flame beyond the confines of the prabhamandala? Because of penetration of illusion and awakening!

By now, the reader may begin to understand the deeper meaning behind the Kesa Thalu Sum design. Could it be an allusion to the Parami of Wisdom—the cultivation of wisdom that the Buddha undertook through countless lifetimes before achieving enlightenment?

The hidden symbolism within these amulets suggests an emphasis on wisdom as the true path to liberation, rather than a mere fascination with supernatural miracles.

The radiant ushnisha extending beyond the prabhamandala serves as a reminder that transcendental wisdom shines far beyond material existence, a lesson urging practitioners to seek enlightenment through insight, rather than supernatural phenomena alone.

THE GOLDEN RATIO IN SOMDEJ WAT RAKANG

Triyampawai also made a fascinating observation in his writings regarding the proportional structure of these amulets. He noted that the ratio between the width of the base and the height of the amulet consistently follows an approximate 2:3 ratio.

Careful measurements confirm this claim. When analyzing the Pim Yai Kesa Thalu Sump amulet, it becomes evident that the tip of the Lokuttara flame aligns precisely with the boundary of the rectangular frame, known among collectors as the Krob Kaew (Mirror Frame).

This frame consists of a slightly raised, delicate line running along the top, left, and right sides, while the bottom edge is notably thicker. Some theorists believe this Mirror Frame was originally intended as a guide for trimming the amulets to achieve a perfect shape. However, in certain amulets where the cut extends beyond the designated frame, it results in an alternate but equally exquisite aesthetic.

Triyampawai considered this Mirror Frame the most beautiful design among all Somdej amulets.

When measured precisely, the ratio of the Mirror Frame's width to the total height (including the Lokuttara flame) once again closely approximates the 2:3 ratio. This suggests that the frame was intentionally crafted to symbolize the all-encompassing nature of supreme wisdom, surrounding the Buddha's radiant halo from all sides.

SOMDEJ WAT RAKANG: SYMBOL OF THE TRIPLE GEM

If the Chinabanchorn Katha (the sacred incantation composed by Somdej Toh) serves as a condensed recitation of the Buddha's divine qualities, then the Somdej Wat Rakang amulet can be seen as a physical representation of the Dhamma itself.

Whenever one gazes upon or holds a Somdej Wat Rakang, one should reflect on its deeper significance as a symbol of the Triple Gem—Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. These three fundamental pillars of Buddhism, are intricately embedded within the structure of the amulet, serving as a reminder of the unwavering refuge in the path of enlightenment.

Below; Pra Somdej Wat Rakang Kositaram Pim Kes Thalu Sum

This sacred design has preserved its mystery for over a century, awaiting only those with the wisdom to uncover its true meaning.

In continuation, in further episodes, we will explore more of the mysteries hidden within the design of the Pra Somdej amulet, revealing the sublime artistic principles that encode profound spiritual truths.

This discussion on Somdej amulet molds is just beginning, and even a mere passing glance is not enough to reach a definitive conclusion. I would say that from my own decades of study and experience, that even a whole lifetime is not enough to finish the study of the immortal Pra Somdej of Somdej Pra Puttajarn (Dto) Prohmrangsri.

However, I shall be doing my best to document as much as possible on this most esteemed, highly valued, sacred, and historically important amulet in the English language, and then hopefully if I live long enough, in other languages as well. But it is as stated, a monumental task to document the legend of this most famous amulet of all time,

Regards

Ajarn Spencer Littlewood

www.ancientamulet.com

www.buddhamagic.net

www.luangphor.com

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Below; Two Pra Somded Pim Chedi (Isosceles triangle geometry molds